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Good Agriculture and Good Sludge

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waste haulers have developed a bad image for land application of sludge. There is often public opposition to the use of sludge as fertilizer because people associate the program with the illegal sludge dumping from past years."

Crouse has gone to great effort to build public acceptance of his sludge recycling efforts. In mid-October, he hosted an open house at Harmony Dale Farms which generated a local newspaper article, headlined "Sludge Use in Soil Seen as Way to Ease Crisis." He explained the monitoring methods as well as the program that will include applications in fall prior to planting a winter crop of oats, wheat or barley and again in spring, prior to planting corn.

Crouse has been interested in what he terms "byproduct waste flows" for many years, such industries as brewery, food and even steel manufacturing which might relate to agriculture, either as livestock feed or for fertilizer. "In late 1980," recalls Crouse, "I became interested in sludges through our local county needs for disposal. I approached the local municipality and Warren County officials, and worked together with the Solid Waste Advisory Council. We continually worked together through the application steps—Board of Health, Planning, Soil Conservation District, county and state Dept. of Agriculture.

"All these inclusions made the process a lot more complicated and were not required by the New Jersey Dept. of Environmental Protection application process. However, I do feel that being very upfront has helped with a successful project. We had our public hearing at the Warren County Court House in February, 1984 with not one negative comment. Now we are gearing up for composting on site adjacent to the storage lagoon."

The first shipment of sludge in August came from M&M/Mars in Hackettstown, NJ, a sludge primarily composed of chocolate and sugar residues. Municipalities near Harmony Dale Farms are showing interest in sending sludge to the Crouse operation. The Warren County Sludge and Septage Management Plan has endorsed agricultural use of sludge and specifically supported the Harmony Dale Farms proposal.

Adds Clerico:

"There are only a few operating sludge farm permits in New Jersey, but there are increasing numbers entering the planning stage. The state's Dept. of Environmental Protection has vowed to streamline the permitting process now that there is a well-defined system for permit submissions.

"Fertilizing agricultural crop land with sludge is true resource recovery. If developed to its fullest potential, it could provide a needed boost to agriculture in New Jersey, and reverse the trend that people and agriculture don't mix." ■